

Today's Sermon

Enduring Unending Love

1 Corinthians 13:7-13

Pastor Phil Layton, GCBC, Dec. 12, 2021

PRAYER FOR NEEDS IN BODY BEFORE SERMON

His mother died when he was 9 years old. His sister died in childbirth. He loved a young woman named Ann Rutledge, but she died at age 22. In his later marriage he had two young sons who died but he persevered.

He suffered from inferiority from his lack of formal education which ended with a partial year of grade school. He was mocked as ignorant and ugly. but he kept on enduring. In business, he failed twice. It was said he suffered a nervous breakdown, was bedridden one time for six months, and he battled depressions throughout his adult life. He went into politics, lost 8 elections but he kept going. He persevered and eventually became the U.S. President

His name: **Abraham Lincoln**. Like 1 Cor 13:7 says, he *endured all things* critics threw at him, through the civil war and till slavery was abolished.¹

He wrote in 1862 "I am a patient man -- always willing to forgive on the Christian terms of repentance; and also to give ample time for repentance... I expect to maintain this [struggle] until successful, or till I die..."

'One of Abraham Lincoln's earliest political enemies was **Edwin M. Stanton**. He called Lincoln a "low cunning clown" and "the original gorilla." "It was ridiculous for people to go to Africa to see a gorilla," he would say, "when they could find one easily in Springfield, Illinois." Lincoln never responded to the slander, but when, as president, he needed a secretary of war, he chose Stanton. When his incredulous friends asked why, Lincoln replied, "Because he is the best man." Years later, as the slain president's body lay in state, Stanton looked into the coffin and said through his tears, "There lies the greatest ruler of men the world has ever seen." His animosity was finally broken by Lincoln's long-suffering, nonretaliatory spirit. Patient love won out.'² Great example of 1 Cor 13, let me read v. 7:

⁷ *Love bears all things, believes all things, hopes all things, endures all things.* ⁸ *Love never ends. As for prophecies, they will pass away; as for tongues, they will cease; as for knowledge, it will pass away.* ⁹ *For we know in part and we prophesy in part,* ¹⁰ *but when the perfect comes, the partial will pass away.* ¹¹ *When I was a child, I spoke like a child, I thought like a child, I reasoned like a child. When I became a man, I gave up childish ways.* ¹² *For now we see in a mirror dimly, but then face to face. Now I know in part; then I shall know fully, even as I have been fully known.* ¹³ *So now faith, hope, and love abide, these three; but the greatest of these is love.*

- Outline:**
1. **The Perseverance of Love (v. 7)**
 2. **The Permanence of Love (v. 8-12)**
 3. **The Pursuit of Love (v. 13). Look at 14:1: *Pursue love ...***

Today our series on the love chapter comes to an end, but the point of this last section is that true love never comes to an end. There's a sense in which this study we've been doing should never end. God's love never ends and so that love inside us is to never end, as we keep pursuing it (pres tense verb)

#1. The Perseverance of Love (v. 7)

Last month we look at the first part of v. 7, how love bears the worst from people, and how love believes and hopes the best in people. **The last phrase in v. 7** really moves into the rest of the chapter. Love '*endures all things. Love never ends.*' NIV has '*always perseveres. Love never fails.*' This is a climactic statement, love never fails to be patient, it never ends being kind.

Love never stops rejoicing in the truth, bearing, believing, hoping, enduring.

Challies: Love *bears all things*, which means it never gives up. It never grows weary of bearing with another person in their best and worst deeds. Love *believes all things*, choosing to believe the best about other people rather than the worst. It puts aside sinful cynicism to assume others are operating out of good motives instead of poor ones. Love *hopes all things* by looking toward other believers with the sincere desire that they are operating out of the best of intentions and the hope that they will accomplish great things for the Lord. And love *endures all things*, by not giving up quickly, but persevering through sin or the appearance of sin. It is quick to forgive, quick to overlook an offense, and slow to cast doubt ...

choose to grant the grace of believing and hoping and bearing and enduring all things... choose to look for the best possible, not the worst possible, explanation. It's good to make assumptions if the assumption is that a person's motives are good ... love calls us to assume the best rather than the worst. Love calls us to regard them with hope rather than suspicion. Out of love for God and our brothers and sisters, we ought to grant them the same mercy ... grace, the same hope we grant ourselves.³

Schreiner giving 'the most favorable interpretation the truth will allow... [love] *always perseveres* and never gives up on people or circumstances'⁴

One scholar translates v. 7-8a this way: '**(7) It never tires of support, never loses faith, never exhausts hope, never gives up. (8) Love never falls apart**'⁵

This sounds like those Janet Oke movies you ladies like: Love's Enduring Promise, and Love's Everlasting Courage, and Love's Unending Legacy. Or maybe you think of a teacher and a Mounty romance. But the love that Paul's talking about isn't like a sentimental chick flick or a romance novel. This love doesn't come softly, it's actually very hard to come by, this love.

This chapter has been killing me softly, convicting me, where my love fails. My love doesn't always persevere. It's hard for us to "endure all things."

But God calls us to persevere in love. And He gives us a proper definition. It's been said 'when the world uses the word love, it is speaking of positive feelings about those who please us and provide us with pleasure. When they no longer please or pleasure us, we —fall out of love. Several years ago on television, a famous sit-com couple exchanged wedding vows, but instead of vowing to remain together —as long as we both shall live, they vowed to remain husband and wife —as long as love shall last.'⁶ That's not this love.

This word in the end of v. 7, love 'endures all things' is a military term. It's someone who fights for what he loves (a cause, a country, one's family).

Lincoln to General Grant in 1864: "I have seen your dispatch expressing your unwillingness to break your hold where you are. Neither am I willing. Hold on with a bull-dog gripe, and chew & choke, as much as possible."⁷

Biblical love is an enduring commitment to act based on Christ's love to us. There are biblical grounds for divorce where the love covenant is broken and godly counsel can't restore it. There is biblical wisdom for a child that may need to leave a home at times. There's boundaries that are needed with unhealthy friendships in some cases. But our calling to love doesn't stop.

People may fail you and relationships may change, but even then, love must not end. Even if someone becomes your enemy, God's Word calls you to love your enemy, pray for to those who mistreat you, do good even to those who are evil and overcome evil with good. As much as possible, as far as it depends on you, love and live at peace with all. We still need to love, even as Jesus loved his betrayer Judas and prayed for those who crucified Him. If you feel like you have no endurance left or your love fails, look to the Lord

When we have exhausted our store of **endurance**, When our strength has **failed** ...
His love has no limits, His grace has no measure, His power no boundary known
 unto men;
 For out of His infinite riches in Jesus He giveth, and giveth, and giveth again.⁸

That's from **the hymn "He Giveth More Grace."** We need grace to endure. Paul uses the **same two words for endure** all in 2 Timothy 2: ⁸*Remember Jesus Christ, risen from the dead ... I **endure** all things [hupomone pas] for the sake of those who are chosen ... if we died with Him, we will also live with Him; If we **endure** [hupomone], we will also reign with Him ... If we are faithless, He remains faithful, for He cannot deny Himself' (v. 8-13 NAS).*

The Lord Jesus remained faithful for Peter even as he denied his Master, so he could write how we can endure by looking to the Lord's example (1 Peter 2:20-21). Jesus is faithful even when we fail to fulfill v. 7 (or v. 4-6)!

Apart from His love we are nothing (1 Corinthians 13:2), and apart from Him we can do nothing (John 15:5), but as we abide in His love and His, we can bear fruit (15:8-10) through His Spirit, whose fruit is love. We endure by "fixing our eyes on Jesus, the author and perfecter of faith, who for the joy set before Him endured [*hupomone*] the cross, despising the shame, and has sat down at the right hand of the throne of God. For consider Him who has endured [*hupomone*] such hostility by sinners against Himself, so that you will not grow weary and lose heart" (Hebrews 12:2-3 NASB).

Give thanks to the Lord, for His love endures forever

An article in the *TableTalk* devotional by Ligonier ministries said it well:

'love endures all things. It tolerates wrong accusations. It endures insults... to press on even when it is overcome by its own sense of guilt and shame... holding on, by faith alone, to the Savior who is holding on to us all the way through ...when we receive criticism, let's look our critics in the eye and say, "You've only scratched the surface!" Let's look at ourselves and be reminded of the words of one theologian who said, "Cheer up; you're worse than you think you are!" There is a freedom that emerges from the ashes of self-defense that has been burned to a crisp by the gospel of grace.'

That's the perseverance of love by the persevering grace of God. That's #1.

#2: the permanence of love (v. 8 goes on 'love never ends...')

In chapter 10 Paul used this Greek word for OT believers whose life ended in the wilderness. Love doesn't end or die out. In Rom 11:11 it's used for falling beyond recovery (love doesn't do that). Jesus used this word for a grain of wheat falling to the ground and dying (Jn 12:24). God's love will never do that, it will never fall like a leaf to the ground that withers. There were apostles and men with miracle-working powers in NT times and they would die out and their gifts would die with them, but their love continues.

Certain gifts would end because they had a limited lifespan and purpose. The big idea of v. 8-12 is: love is permanent but some gifts are temporary. Miraculous gifts would come to an end, but God's gift of love never ends. *As for prophecies, they will pass away; as for tongues, they will cease...*

That's the **gift of tongues**, the ability to speak a language you never studied by a miracle like Acts 2, human languages, also uses Greek word **dialektos (dialects)**. The original disciples in Jerusalem spoke so all the people groups of Jews from all around the world heard the mighty works of God in their own native tongue.

How strange they spoke like those foreigners! But so many of those Jews in Jerusalem still weren't believers in Jesus Christ.

Look at 1 Corinthians 14: ²¹ *In the Law it is written, "By people of strange tongues and by the lips of foreigners will I speak to this people, and even then they will not listen to me, says the Lord."* ²² *Thus tongues are a sign not for believers but for unbelievers...* So the purpose of this strange phenomena of being able to speak in the tongues or languages of foreigners was a sign to unbelievers. In the context of what Paul quotes from the OT, it's a sign to unbelieving Jews who wouldn't listen to the message from God's spokesmen. God spoke to His people Israel through foreign languages in Acts 2, but because they rejected the miracles and message of God, it was a sign of Israel's judgment

As Pentecost came with miraculous languages when Galilean Jews spoke to all the language groups of Jews there, it was a sign to unbelieving Jews: if they wouldn't listen Jerusalem would be judged by foreign invading armies. Paul wrote of the purpose of tongues in 50s AD and foreign-speaking Romans destroyed Jerusalem in 70 AD. The purpose in v. 21 ended, and that may be why 13:8 says tongues would end (and when, they passed the sign).

Also 2 Cor 12:12 says the signs of a true apostle were miraculous sign gifts. The gift of apostle of Jesus died (only 12 of them, Rev 21), and their signs.

Think of signs on the freeway that show something is coming. After you get there and keep going you don't see signs for what's already past. Tongues is called a sign, it warned of the judgment coming in 70 AD and signaled that God was moving from Israel to the world. Its purpose ceased so it ceased. It also ceases from the pages of the NT after 1 Cor 12-14 and disappears from church history for 1800 years. When did tongues cease as v. 8 said? Church history gives the answer. In 96 AD Clement wrote 65 chapters to Corinth's church, no mention of tongues. Modern claims of it don't match up Acts 2.

1 Cor 13:11 *When I was a child, I spoke like a child, I thought like a child, I reasoned like a child. When I became a man, I gave up childish ways.* Some think the point is the infancy of the church needed this, but as the church grew and matured, that was no longer needed. I'm not sure but that's a view

Prophecy is a bit more complicated, is this foretelling or forth-telling (just telling forth what God has already told us, part of what Bible prophets did).

Rev 11 seems to say there will still be a type of prophesying before the 2nd coming, but Rev 22 also warns not to add new revelation-type prophecy. Some define prophecy more like preaching today than predicting the future.

⁹ *For we know in part and we prophesy in part,* ¹⁰ *but when the perfect comes, the partial will pass away.* Some take that as when the perfect full NT comes.

In other words, we have all the knowledge and prophecy we need in the perfect and complete scriptures (not the partial ones when Paul wrote 1 Cor 13). I like that view. It's true. But it could also be that this is telling forth God's Word instead of foretelling the future, proclaiming the prophetic Word, but not adding to it. That does continue till the 2nd coming.

¹² *For now we see in a mirror dimly, but **then face to face**. Now I know in part; **then I shall know fully, even as I have been fully known** [i.e., in the way God fully knows me, I will know fully and will see face to face unlike the way I see now]. That sounds like the 2nd coming or when we go to glory so I think v. 12 is talking about the end of time, but not new revelation like the end of Revelation talks about (and miraculous gifts could end earlier).*

To study further, sermonaudio.com/gcbc **study on miraculous gifts 8/5/07**¹⁰

But don't miss the big idea, gifts will end, but God's love never will for us. Heaven is a world of love, face to face with Him, intimate full knowledge. It's the never-ending love of Jer 31:3: *I loved you with an everlasting love.* Ps 103:17: *the steadfast love of the Lord is from everlasting to everlasting.* The steadfast love of the Lord never ceases, His mercies never come to an end but are new every morning (Lam. 3:22-23). "But this I call to mind... Because of the LORD's great love...his compassions never fail" (v. 21-22)¹¹

This is the love that never ends that keeps believers till the end of their life. **A dying reformer** testified of this "My hearing is gone, my smelling is gone, and my sight is going: my speech and feeling are almost gone; but the lovingkindness of God is still the same, and will never depart from me."¹²

QUOTE ROMANS 8 – HIS LOVE FOR US – OUR LOVE IN ROM 12

Ryken: Our love often fails. Indeed, we fail to love as much as we fail at anything else in life. It is when we run out of love, especially, that we need to remember the never-failing love of Jesus. When the Scripture says that nothing can separate us from the love of God, this includes our own feeble efforts to love like Jesus. As we try and often fail to love, we are at the very same time being loved by God, because we can never be separated from that love! Therefore, we should never say, "I have no love left to give," because at the very moment we say that, we are still being loved by the invincible love of Jesus. At every place in life where we find it hard to love, the love of Jesus is there to help us. Not even a loveless heart can separate us from his love. By faith in [Jesus], we are permanently connected to a love source that will never fail, and therefore our love can be renewed... We will find, again and again, that we cannot love without his love to carry us along. But we will also find, again and again, that his love is right there with us.¹³

That takes us from the permanence of love to...

#3. The pursuit of love

¹³ So now faith, hope, and love abide, these three; but the greatest of these is love. [faith and hope go away when face to face] **14:1 Pursue love ...**

If love is “the greatest of these,” then love is our greatest need. Jesus said the greatest commandment is to love the Lord with all you are and love your neighbor as yourself. Then this needs to be our greatest pursuit.

NIV: *‘Follow the way of love.’* NLT: *‘Let love be your highest goal.’* An expanded Greek translation: ‘Be constantly pursuing this love, earnestly endeavoring to acquire it.’ One paraphrases ‘Go after a life of love as if your life depended on it.’ This word means to chase or hunt after love, like Saul of Tarsus once chased down Christians. It’s translated seek to or practice (Rom 12:13). Paul also uses it for pressing forward to the finish mark as an Olympic runner. It starts with wholehearted love to Jesus.

How do we pursue unending love? There’s an endless supply of application in chapter 13: love is patient (a patience that never ends), love is kind (never ending kindness). Take any aspect of that passage and pursue it, never give up, excel still more. Pursue love by pursuing people who are hard to love, show them unceasing kindness, God’s unlimited patience. If we know the love of God who does all of 1 Cor 13 for us in Christ His love in us can bear all things, believe all things, hope all things, endure all things and never end

APPLICATION: BOOKS AT BOOK TABLE TO HELP PURSUE MORE

The “One Anothers” of NT: Ways to apply Christ’s love to His people

1. Be at peace with one another – Mark 9:50
2. Love one another – John 13:34
3. Be devoted to one another – Romans 12:10
4. Give preference to one another – Rom. 12:10
5. Don’t judge one another’s liberty – Romans 14:13
6. Accept one another – Romans 15:7
7. Admonish one another – Romans 15:14
8. Care for one another – I Corinthians 12:25
9. Serve one another – Galatians 5:13
10. Bear one another’s burdens – Galatians 6:2
11. Show forbearance to one another – Ephesians 4:2
12. Be kind to one another, tender-hearted, forgiving one another – Ephesians 4:32
13. Speak to one another in psalms, hymns, and spiritual songs – Ephesians 5:19
14. Submit to one another in the fear of Christ – Ephesians 5:21
15. Regard one another as more important than himself – Philippians 2:3
16. Bear with one another – Colossians 3:13

17. Teach and admonish one another – Colossians 3:16
18. Abound in love or one another – I Thessalonians 3:12
19. Comfort one another – I Thessalonians 4:18
20. Encourage one another – I Thessalonians 5:11
21. Build up one another – I Thessalonians 5:11
22. Live in peace with one another – I Thessalonians 5:13
23. Seek the good of one another – I Thessalonians 5:15
24. Stimulate one another to love and good deeds – Hebrews 10:23
25. Don't forsake assembling with one another, but let us encourage one another – Hebrews 10:24
26. Confess your sins to one another – James 5:16
27. Pray for one another – James 5:16
28. Fervently love one another from the heart – I Peter 1:22
29. Be hospitable to one another without complaint – I Peter 4:9
30. Employ your spiritual gift in serving one another – I Peter 4:10
31. Clothe yourselves with humility toward one another – I Peter 5:5
32. Have fellowship with one another – I John 1:7

Rom 12 just a few pages back shows us how that can look very practically:

¹⁰ *Love one another with brotherly affection. Outdo one another in showing honor...* ¹³ **Contribute to the needs of the saints and seek to show hospitality** [lit. love of strangers, it must be shown and in v. 20 love shown to enemies, not just needs of saints, feeding hungry enemies, meeting needs of enemies]

How is that possible? Remember Rom. 5, we were God's enemies, *but God* showed unending love to us in Christ. Remember the love Rom 8 ends with:

Who shall separate us from the love of Christ? Shall tribulation, distress, or persecution, or famine, or nakedness, or danger, or sword?...I am sure that neither death nor life, nor angels nor rulers, nor things present nor things to come, nor powers, nor height nor depth, nor anything else in all creation, will be able to separate us from the love of God in Christ Jesus our Lord.

God's unending love in Rom 8 empowers our love in Rom 12 to keep going

George Matheson was able to pursue unending love even when his eyesight came to an end. He was engaged to be married but when his fiancée found out about that he was gonna be blind, her love for him ended. She broke off her engagement. But he trusted in the love of Christ from 1 Cor 13:8, a love that never ends. He continued to pursue love despite his handicap and pain, he kept abiding in faith, hope, and love; he became a blessed beloved pastor

He wrote when he was alone and his sister married 'Something happened to me, which was known only to myself, and which caused me the most severe mental suffering. The hymn was the fruit of that suffering.

It was the quickest bit of work I ever did in my life...the whole work was completed in five minutes...never ...any retouching or correction...this came like a dayspring from on high.’ Some think he was thinking back on his fiancée’s love that abandoned him when he wrote: O Love That Wilt Not Let Me Go

O light that followest all my way, I yield my flickering torch [going blind?] to thee;
My heart restores its borrowed ray, That in thy sunshine’s blaze its day
May brighter, fairer be ... [it ends with] Life that shall endless be.

God’s love never ends, so let’s never end in our pursuing love together, and when human love fails and feelings go, trust His love that will not let us go. Where our light and love flickers or falters, if our hearts grow cold, let’s pray for His love to burn in us and burn away sin, and kindle our affections.

¹ <https://kazantoday.com/WeeklyArticles/abraham-lincoln.html>

² John F. MacArthur Jr., *1 Corinthians*, MacArthur New Testament Commentary (Chicago: Moody Press, 1984), 339.

³ Tim Challies, “Please Do and Please Don’t Assume Motives,” <https://www.challies.com/articles/please-do-please-dont-assume-motives/> (accessed September 17, 2021).

⁴ Alan Johnson, *1 Corinthians*, IVPNTC, 7:253.

⁵ Anthony C. Thiselton, *The First Epistle to the Corinthians: A Commentary on the Greek Text*, New International Greek Testament Commentary (Grand Rapids, MI: W.B. Eerdmans, 2000), 1026.

⁶ <https://bible.org/seriespage/lesson-5-what-love-looks-1-corinthians-134-7>

⁷ <http://abrahamlincolnonline.org/lincoln/speeches/persevere.htm>

⁸ Annie Johnson Flint, “He Giveth More Grace.”

⁹ “Love Believes All Things,” by Gabriel N.E. Fluhrer, TableTalk, August 2019

¹⁰ <https://www.sermonaudio.com/search.asp?keyword=gcbc&keyworddesc=&currsection=sermonsource&SourceOnly=true&keywordwithin=miraculous&x=0&y=0>

¹¹ NIV.

¹² — quoted in John Willison, *The Practical Works of John Willison*, ed. W. M. Hetherington (Glasgow, 1852), 322.

¹³ Philip Graham Ryken, *Loving the Way Jesus Loves*.